

Historic District Commission

Meeting Minutes

2025-07-22

7:00 PM

Online, Town Hall, 472 Main St, Acton, MA 01720

Present: David Honn (DH), David Shoemaker (DS), Anita Rogers (AR), Barbara Rhines (BR) (Acton Cultural Resources Coordinator), Art Leavens (AL), Zach Taillefer (ZT)

Absent: Fran Arsenault (FA)

Opening:

DH opened the meeting at 7:03 pm. DH read the “remote meeting notice” due to COVID-19.

1. Regular Business.

A. Citizen's Concerns – None.

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – 8 July Minutes. DS moved their adoption, seconded by AL. AR, DH, DS, AL, ZT in favor. Approved.

C. Review Project Tracking Spreadsheet / Chair Updates:

Outstanding and Completed COAs/CNAs/Denials

- 75 School Street #2520 (AR)
- 113 Main Street #2524 retaining wall (ZT)
- 450 Main Street Solar – (AR) Done
- 106 Main Street #2526 Deck. Will be discussed at 8/12 meeting
- 113 Main Street Sign Application is being worked on for 8/12 meeting
- 250 Central Street (Theatre III) working on application for rot repair
- 56 River Street deck – waiting for application
- Initiatives:
 - Concord Road HD
 - New Historic Districts
 - Single Building Historic Districts
 - Demolition by Neglect Bylaw
 - Historic District Construction Funding Sources
- Request for an update on 53 River Street from the Town Aug 12

2. New/Special Business or other applicable agenda items

A. 7:15 Solar Guidelines update (continued discussion) DH: Ongoing discussion. Change of

R&R to be reviewed; then Guidelines which are an internal document and guidance. BR shares document showing the updates in red. AL provides narrative to interpret the motivations for the changes in the **two documents**. DH notes that emails were sent to the HDC that suggested that the HDC *must* approve proposals to requests **to install solar equipment**; this is not correct. The HDC must give ‘substantial weight’ to requests. AL: Latest copy **of suggested changes to Solar Guidelines** circulated; June 24 outcomes and some further changes for discussion today are flagged. In the guidelines per se, 1b includes the threat of climate change. Point 2 notes that substantial impact on historically significant historical features shall not be permitted. DH offers a more substantial list. Roof features: Dormers, turrets, porches, widow’s walks ‘and the like’ should be added. AL: An exception to the rule was considered but struck. Point 3: An exception was proposed which the HDC chose not to adopt. Proposal: to add ‘directly’ to front on **the governing way**. AL: An **application to install solar panels on the roof of a secondary building that faces the governing way but does not front** directly on the street could be approved – whether a secondary building or in fact an independent residence. DH: How far back? ‘In the opinion of the HDC’: Guidelines, not rules. AR, ZT: Hesitant to be too prescriptive. DH: the HDC ‘may consider’? AL: May have **more** applications due to the flexibility implied, and that is fine. AR: Case by case decisions. AL: Not entitled, but please come see us. **Thinks Guidelines do** say this explicitly at the start and/or end of Guidelines. The Guidelines help the HDC as well as the public in decision-making. Point 6: **re panels matching color of the roof**. BR: we want the panel to blend in with the current roof and surrounding details, to minimize the contrast of the panels. ZT: Conduit ‘must be painted to match’, so already have this kind of consideration. AR: a treatment could be added to bring the roof on the face of the panels. AR: “Established” is not useful. DS: would prefer to remove ‘in color’ given our limited authority in that domain. Point 7: 3” or 3.5” – DH: The intent is to have the panels as close to the roof as practicable. AR: could request a sample. ZT: 1b, Capitalize Solar Energy Systems? AL: yes. DH: Conduits, inverters, should not be visible – check that this is already discussed elsewhere. DS: want to be sure that there are considerations for non-roof mounted Solar Energy Systems. Should not be able to see it – ground mounted arrays could be trivially hidden with a fence. A post-mounted array would be a different. AL: we don’t have a ‘no see’ rule for e.g., auxiliary buildings, so do not want to bring one in for ground-mounted systems. Public contributions: Scott Kutil: Sent pictures of a system outside of the district but abutting. Images are shared. The solar panel is well hidden from the owner’s governing way, but not in the district. Believes the Solar Energy System should include a structure as part of the definition. DH: For this non-HDC specific case, there could be a remedy through the zoning bylaw. DH asks BR to show 3.6 in the general Acton zoning bylaws; 3.65 addresses Ground-mounted solar systems. 3.8.4.10-11 is relevant; 5.5 b1: xvii. Motion on this issue requires new language for the zoning code, with the usual rules. SK: P8, criteria for deliberation. Makes reference to general concepts of the built environment. 8.2 give the commission leeway to impose restrictions over and above zoning. AR: the HDC cannot extend its considerations beyond the limits of the property lines of the properties in the Districts. DH: Suppose it is not a solar array – but instead an inappropriate addition out of view of the governing way. SK: Neighbors are in the surrounding area. AL: For properties in the historic districts, if it is visible from the governing way, it is in the jurisdiction of the HDC. 8.3 has been changed by the legislature. The desire is to be carbon-neutral in a finite time. DS: Do we have any authority over the things that can’t be seen, but which affect the

neighborhood historic character? AL: no. DH: should impact on neighbors of an 'invisible' project be in the HDC domain? Might be worth some consideration. DH: Continue this discussion; focus on non-roof mounted arrays at the next meeting. SK: curious if other Historic District Commissions have considered these considerations. AL: not seen any others with more definition than Acton.

- B. 20:25 Application #2525 451 Main Street Roof. Travis Odom (TO) joins. Application for replacement of roof. Leaks have appeared. Corning Architectural shingle is proposed. Striving to match neighbors and a solar panel proposal. Continue with rubber on the flat roofs. AR: The proposed is a 'high def' roofing, with 5 different colors. Most do have grey roofs, but no high def. TO: simplest color according to the contractor; AR does not agree. DH: 3-tabs are still available. Next step is 'architectural shingles'. High def, and Ultra-high def; do not use Ultra. AR: Different manufacturers have different definitions of 'Def'. DH: The HDC needs a sample; it should be put on the roof. CertainTeed Landmark is widely used in HDC. GAF Timberland, and Owens-Corning are other frequently selected manufacturers. DH: Don't want mottled imitation something. Can make a CNA once you send in a sample. AR: the proposed roof carried excessive complexity in the appearance. Public Comment: Eugenio Fernandez, across the street. On color, a flat color tends to look very fake and very different than the original wood or slate. Other options for low-slope roofs membranes could be considered. AL: Ensure that the other details **required for CNA approval** are included in the **application**. The separately proposed solar panels are not seen from the governing way and furthermore not relevant to the current application.
- C. 8:50 285 Arlington Street Pre-application discussion. AR recuses herself. Lisa Adamiak (LA) joins. Slides shared. The house needs repair; windows not yet assessed, but hope to preserve them. Intent is to establish two domiciles, one in the house, and one in the barn. The concept is presented. Chimneys are restricting layout; the left chimney is less substantial and a request could come to remove it. DH: can arrange a site visit. AL: Ambitious and interesting project. DS: preserve the current barn character when adding windows. Fun project. ZT: Need to learn more about the historical value of the connector. DH: Have previously allowed subsidiary chimneys to be removed. Maybe move the monument. The setting is lacking; maybe regrade the front lawn, add a wall. Landscaping really needs thought; a landscape architect is needed. LA: The connector may not be preserved – demolition and reconstruction for instance, as there is no foundation. DH: Any feature 6" or more above grade is in the HDC purview. DS: Perhaps we could say something of the character that 'Any wall that has more than a foot of exposed surface is in the HDC purview'. AL: If the connector is to be demolished, strict rules are imposed. Should start with that aspect of the project. LA: MACRIS says the original house is embedded in the current house, although there is some ambiguity in the meaning. The HDC requests a video be considered. ZT offers to walk through with a connection to e.g., DH. DS: likes the idea of a video for archival value. AL: The School St presentation which enabled permission to demolish is a good example for how to proceed.
AR rejoins.
- D. 8:30 9 School Street Pre-application discussion. BR: there is motion but no applicant present. DH: any changes should lead to a discussion at an HDC meeting.

3. Consent Items

None

1. Adjournment

At 21:33 DH moves to adjourn the meeting, AR seconds. DS, AR, DH, AL, ZT all approve.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting.

- All relevant Applications and Documents, in Docushare